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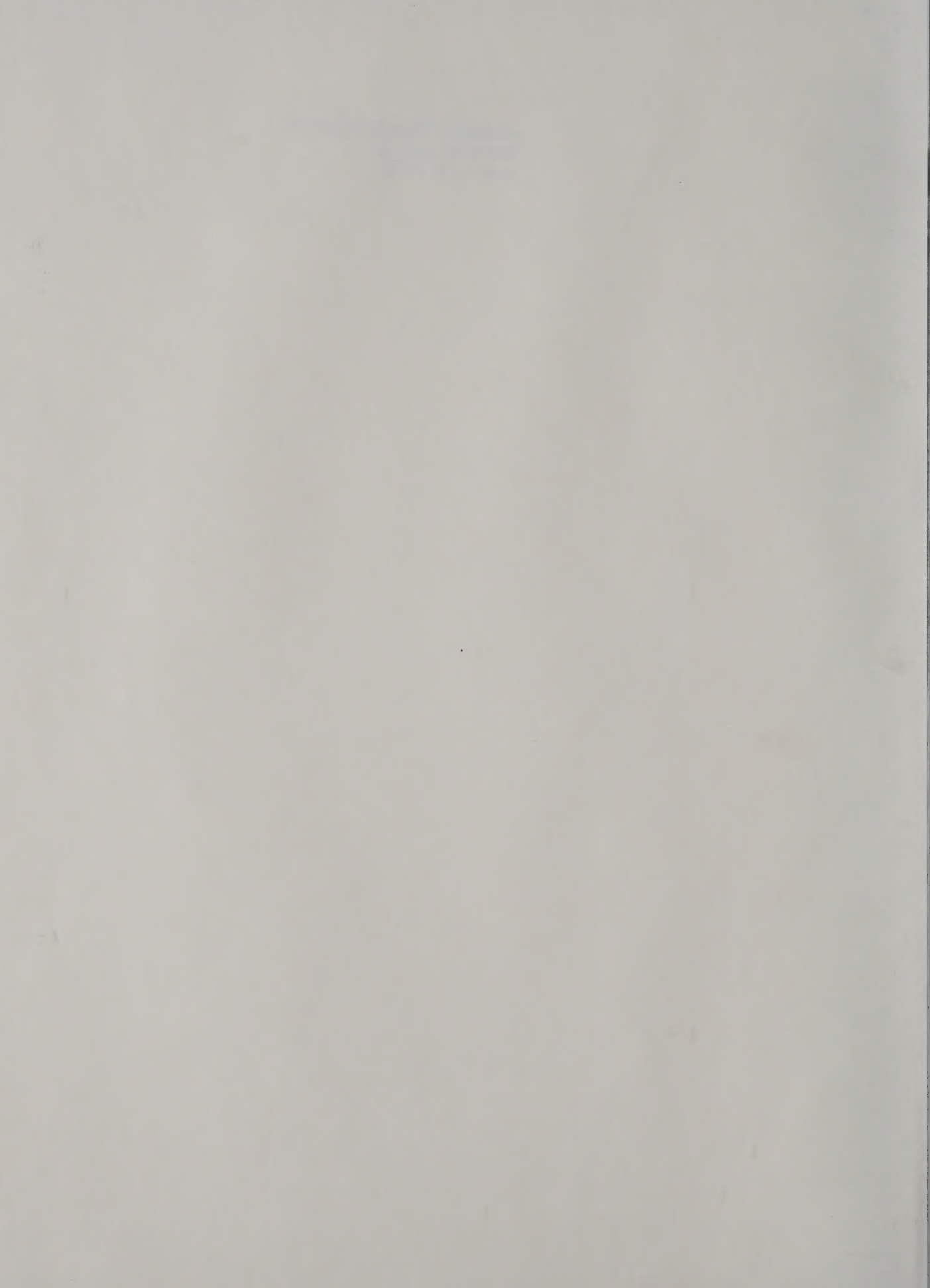


FAMILY
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CIVIL WAR DIARY

of

Q. M. Sergeant J. O. Coburn

Co. I, 6th Michigan Cavalry

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This previously unpublished diary recounts the tragic conditions and events experienced by a Union soldier from the time of his capture in October, 1863 until his death 8 March 1864 in the Belle Isle prison camp at Richmond, Virginia.

A fellow prisoner and deathbed companion wrote to the father of Sgt. Coburn, "your son fell a victim to the inhuman treatment of our captors, and I do not overstate the truth when I say that he literally starved to death on Bell Isle."

This diary is believed to be a significantly important record of the Civil War period because of the lucid accounts of the daily occurrences which were observed by an obviously intelligent and educated man.

After the death of Jacob Osborn Coburn, the sergeant in charge of his hospital ward took the diary and kept it in his possession until after the war. He managed to get a letter through to Osborn's father, Rev. John F. Coburn, DeKalb County, Indiana, telling of his death, which occurred very suddenly after a long illness and seeming recovery. After the war, the sergeant, who was a Northern man, either delivered or sent the diary to John F. Coburn.

In the late 1930's, the Rev. Walter H. Coburn, using the original handwritten diary, endeavored to copy off as accurately as possible the Civil War Diary of Jacob Osborn Coburn. Rev. Coburn describes the original diary:

"It is leather bound about 3 x 5 in size. The leather looks like cowhide, I suspect tan originally, but now a beautiful brown. It has a flap on the back cover with two slots to put the flap through so that it is quite closed to be carried. It is lined fairly closely. Uncle's writing in the beginning was good - not esthetically - but easily read. Finally he realized he was running out of space and then wrote two lines to a ruled line. Also, as he grew weaker his writing deteriorated making it more difficult to decipher. Also, there is a slight difference in letter formation adding to the difficulty. But the book was in excellent condition. One marvels at the condition when you consider the crowded prison conditions. The writing as well as the English shows a fairly well educated man. He was in the cavalry."

The pages which follow are a faithful reproduction of Rev. Coburn's transcription of the handwritten diary.

Oct. 18th, 1863. Fight commenced at 7:00 A.M. at 9:00 A.M. the entire Federal command was marching under a strong guard. We had no breakfast & marched till 11 O.C. next day with nothing to eat when we got one lb. of beef without any salt.

Oct. 19th. Eating some beef half cooked on coals without salt we rested till 3 1/2 O.C. when we left the South bank of the North branch of Shenandoah, Banks' old battle field near Fort Royal & moved across South branch. Did not go to Strassburg as was first intended a Fed. force being in the way as we learned. This P. M. we moved on way up the stream along the streams rocky path & camped in a narrow valley upon the bank of the Shenandoah between two ranges of mountains.

Oct. 20th. Our route is yet up the narrow and interesting valley. How great the contrast between this and the lower valley. There a gentle undulating surface once in a fair state of cultivation with Bolwin Hts. and Bunker Hill rising perceptibly above the other points & well watered by beautiful small brooks. Here the valley is not more than two miles wide at any place, often not 1/2 of a mile and then very much "cut up." We have eaten one small piece of meat at "M." Now at 3 O.C. we are encamped upon a small plateau and preparations are making for a "repast." This is up to 3:00 P. M.

Contrary to expectations we remained here throughout the day. Drew some more meat & bread & have plenty to eat. Our treatment on the whole is somewhat better than I expected but the walk is very severe. Weather has cleared away & is becoming quite pleasant.

Oct. 21st. We awoke this morning with a clear sky overhead. Glorious "Old Sol" is spreading his golden light broadcast over the green capped mountains that seem entirely to surround us. The drooping branches of the cedars, the cone topped Pines interspersed here & there with the chestnuts gold tinted by frost's displeasure, the occasional chirping of a bird or whistle of a quail aye, everything trying to make me believe I am not a prisoner of war. But the steady watch of the sentinel near me, the tramp of "Grayback" troops all around, assures me that it is too true & that escape is impossible. Well we have a long march ahead today, & the "order" is to start & march we did till we had passed on & up the narrow valley, through a gap in the mountains resting a while upon the summit attained then passing down, down, down to the Shenandoah proper (the other being but a tributary) which we had to ford. A mile or two more & we were upon the "Staunton Pike" where the Shenandoah proper presented itself to our view in all its beauty, grandeur, age, & glory, though its best portion is marred by the effects of war. Distant mountain ridges look beautiful while the undulating surface of the vale is really picturesque.

October 22nd. The morning opens beautiful from our camp about one mile S. of the little village of Mount Jackson. We are getting ready to move.

1) General Banks (Nathaniel Prentiss Banks (1816-1894), a Federal general in the Civil War.

3 O.C. We are resting. I am beneath the shade of the red cedars upon the bank of a clear running brook. The mountain range a few miles to the southward is but a shade or two deeper blue than the clear sky above. The country is very pretty & Oct. has done much to improve it but that other "Act of War" has in places made sad havoc of the architecture, mechanics & laborers effort. Our march along "The Pike," a well McAdamized road, is a very tedious one. We cannot get enough to eat. The citizens have not got it. One told a soldier, "If it had not been for our (your) d--d army we could have had plenty." Yankee replied, "If it hadn't been for their (your) d--d army ours would not have passed through here." Secesh replied, "Well thats so." seeming to appreciate all that was said & meant. We shall have to move soon wonder how soon our "days march" will end & how near is that to the end of our march? Continued our march to within two miles of Harrisonburg, where we camped. I think I never was so footsore fatigued & completely worried out as tonight.

October 23rd. Feel much rested this morning & resumed the march with more ease & comfort than I anticipated. The weather was cool & I stand the march quite well, but a dream I had night before last is yet much in my mind. I dreamed that my Mattie² was then living, but circumstances required that I should leave her & marry another & that I had contracted such marriage, with her knowledge & consent. We were separated for a while, quite a long while, & that I had some pleasant time with my new spouse (to her). But by some strange circumstance, I met Mattie. In a little log house in a strange wild place my old love for her immediately returned (renewed)³. I seized her, embraced her & wept. It awoke me & I was yet weeping. A little sadness continues to follow me. Just at night it commenced raining & at near dark we were marched into a piece of woods to camp, while it rained dreadfully. O what a cheerless night & yet the boys would sing Union songs & sing them right lusty too. The night was passed with half rations for supper of fresh beef & in keeping up fire with but very little rest or sleep. And now I think of it I will mention the amount of fare we have had during the march. Sunday, had the fight without any breakfast, were taken & marched 28 mile Stopping near 12 O.C. at night, laid down in the rain till daylight, then marched about ten miles & got about one lb. of fresh (nearly so) beef, about 11 O.C. Monday marched again till dark & got one lb. of flour & half lb. of beef with salt. Tuesday marched all day without rations till dark received then three crackers 3/4 lb. beef with salt. Wednesday and Thursday same. Friday marched all day, had only 1/2 lb. beef for supper and laid in the rain all night.

October 24th. This is Saturday and the seventh day of our march. We are at Staunton having marched seven miles through a light rain & camped in a shed stable partially cleaned. An abundance of hard bread, some poor bacon & plenty of fresh beef was furnished us.

October 25th. Sunday and just one week after our capture we find ourselves all ready to take the "cars" for Richmond & we were agreeably surprised to find ourselves on board well warmed passenger coaches, with a very pleasant day Phoenix

2) His deceased wife.
3) Not certain of word.

and a fine undulating country so far. Appears to be getting more level but mountain tops are to be seen in the distance in various directions. Waynesborough County thus far about the same. The village has perhaps five-hundred souls. Greenwood is East of two tunnels in the blue ridge then W. 3/4 of a mile the other sixty rods of course it is very rough but a nice valley is to the right of us and below us. Charlottesville three thousand. Nice and pleasant country E. of Blue Ridge. Gordonsville three or four thousand or thereabouts, country getting undulating. Seems to be well defended by artillery, have been sleeping and missed the country back of Charlottesville. My eyes are very sore and annoy me very much. Well saw that much of the country is very level wet & uninteresting from Gordonsville to Richmond there was nothing worth mentioning. Arrived at Richmond about 8 O.C. and were marched to an old Tobacco house near "Libby Prison" where we turned in without any rations all day. Slept upon a dirty floor without any covers or anything under us.

October 26th. Monday. We are up with the sun having slept soundly from previous lack of sleep & fatigue for there was nothing else inviting to repose. We find here a few troops from Burnside's, Grant's & Rosecrans' army, brought in lately. The news from the various seats of war are full as encouraging as we could expect through Rebel sources probably far less so than our own papers would have us believe. At 3 O.C. rations are issued to us. Just half rations of good soft bread & good boiled beef. I ate part of mine only as I shall need the balance more in the morning. The time is passed principally in walking the floor, telling war scenes, adverse times &c. We "go to bed" early to secure a favorable position on the floor. Wrote a short letter to Father and Eva⁴ to be sent by flag or truce boat which is here.

October 27th. The sun rose tolerably clear this morning & it would be a treat to be able to promenade the streets of Richmond but prisoners have no such privileges. It is quite a novelty to me as I was never before in any manner under duress & can truly say that no earthly record of any kind can show ought against me. My name does not appear even as the party to any suit of law. O how I hope this may continue to be true & that the Great Book will show as clear a record for me.

God smiles outside in the genial rays of the shining sun & everything seems bright. We are told that a general exchange of prisoners occurred on the 1st. of Nov. I trust that He is thus smiling upon us & that we shall soon cease to be prisoners, thought it be but little more pleasant to be in any part of the army service. I am certainly thinking of home & friends. One picture only have I left all the rest are captured or destroyed. My money has been taken away from me & only Eva⁵ is taken from my pocket at times to smile upon me & assure me that she has remained with me as my guardian angel & that I certainly shall outlive the war to be happy with her. The day passes on relived only by our attempted game of chess. Myself & opponent are both amateur players hence but little real interest in the game. We received our usual 1/2 load of bread & small piece of meat. We are told the bread ration will be doubled to us tomorrow.

4) His fiancée.

5) The one picture must have been of Eva.

Oct. 28. Wednesday. Looking from the window we behold a pretty Autumn morning outside, which has a slight influence upon the feeling of the prisoners within but we want Liberty. The hearts of the men are cheered up this morning by the report said to have come from a Rebel officer that we were to be immediately paroled & sent to Point Lookout until further arrangements could be made concerning us. This may be so, I hope it is but I have long since learned to give little credence to "Camp rumors." O how I long for something to read merely to while away the tedious hours but nothing is to be had, So we sit & look & listen, wish & wonder till we are tired. Yet there is little gloom & discontent manifest. The men generally keep up a cheerful appearance & make the best of a hard fate. Well I have written so much early in the morning. Let us see what occurs through the day.

The sun is setting gloriously & from the windows of our prison room the scene is a golden one. The rippling water of the ancient James glistening beneath the soft yellow rays of the setting, the gold tinted leaves of the Shineberry⁶ near & distant forest, the milky azure of the blue expanse above are all beautiful & so suggestive of the greatness & grandness of Nature's works. One feels like seeing but to love them, but God's works as all else is viewed to better advantage where Liberty & a "full stomach" can assist in appreciating them.

Our rations today are the same except that the quantity of meat was considerably diminished. Just as "Old Sol" has laid himself down I close to await the dawn of tomorrow taking twilight to look at & think of Eva & many other things ere I sleep. I have slept but such a sleep. I may as well describe the manner of "resting."

The floor is swept, then the men arrange themselves in rows on either side with their heads to the walls, lying in "close order" in the manner usually called "spoon fashion." Two similar rows are formed with their hands to the center of the room. We are without blankets or overcoats except in a few instances. Hence the "close order" to assist in warming each other with the united warmth of the body. Long before morning our bones become very tired from contact with the hard floor, which with the cool nights makes the nights to us very unpleasant. Various rumors continue to circulate as to the disposition to be made with prisoners, but I can place little confidence in any of them and conjecture is useless.

Oct. 29th. Thursday. Another pleasant morning outside. All hands seem cheerful this morning. More so than one could have reason to expect or than is usual. Wonder if it is the forerunner to our liberation or habitual calm that precedes the bursting of the gathering storm. It is rumored that our pickets have approached to within four or five miles, somewhere (Don't believe it) that Meade has driven Lee to this side of the Rappahannock (quite reasonable) & that he has orders to move on to Richmond if possible (Possible it is so but if true how did the report get here. So no confidence is to be given to reports.) It has been told us also that no exchanges or paroles are to take place during the war.

6) Chinaberry tree?

The truth is, the man telling it though a Rebel officer knew no more about it than I did.

On such a time as all hands are having cleaning floors here. The whole building was very filthy & the lice were intolerable. It is to be hoped the cleaning will partially end them for a while. All kinds of rumors concerning exchanges. That is & will be the all absorbing topic so long as we remain here. Am trying to sell my watch for something to eat. I did think I could not part with it but hunger will make me yield I guess. One has to be very cautious too, as the only means of effecting such a sale is contraband & it wont do to expose neither myself or parties buying. I would sell almost anything I have for bread but that which was given me for keepsakes as especially Eva's presents. Those I will not sell but to save life.

Well I declare it is 4:30 O.C. & nothing since 2 O.C. yesterday to eat & only 1/2 rations then. It is rather amusing to witness the effect it has on different persons to become so hungry. Some are cross. Some despondent. Some make light of it. While the greater share seem to be content pacing the floor & minding their own business, mostly thoughts. Well how do I feel & act? I feel hungry. That's certain. Well I have been lying upon the "mess table" doing nothing more & seeing nearly nothing until it suddenly entered my mind to note down something about it & here it is.

Just at dark our rations came. Bread the same & meat rather more than restored so that we made quite a comfortable supper while the prudent ones here had a handsome piece of bread for the morning. Like the swine in the sty, we eat & lie down. There is one benefit arising from this course. It prevents a rapid digestion.

30th. Friday. As usual all hands are on the move with the dawn of day. Eat the little bread left from last night ration & commence talking over the prospects of release. Last night there was an arrival at this building of some 200 or more prisoners from Mobile who had once been paroled but something seems to have been wrong as are all yet detained.

Last night paper was brought into the room which states "that all prisoners taken prior to Nov. 1st. are to be paroled & sent to our camps of parole but not exchanged. All taken after Nov. 1st. are to be retained & be fed by the respective governments," that is the U.S. feeds the Union prisoners in Rebel prisons & vice versa. Knowing the difficulties of them in the way of exchange the report looks highly probable. If it is so we may look for our return to Loyal regions within the next ten days though no return to duty perhaps till the war is over.

Well I was much pleased to meet my old friend W. P. Montague. I cannot say I was surprised for I knew he was a prisoner somewhere & rather supposed he had been sent to Richmond. We are having a good visit. He is here with us I suppose we are all called Eastern troops. This I trust will take us to Camp Chase, Columbus, Ohio where I shall be near my friends should furlough be granted to paroled prisoners. Rations are issued to us at 2 O.C. They are as large as at any previous time.

Oct. 31st. The night before passed was much warmer than at any time since our arrival & I slept quite well. This morning it is raining though the air is warm & our quarters comfortable. We could get along quite well if we only had enough to eat. I had given up the idea of selling my watch on account of the reports alluded to but now again the prospect looks more dark & I have half a mind to sell it. I believe I will not take less than \$50 for it though until I have starved awhile longer.

Near noon the clouds broke away & a warm sun was let in upon us that is so far as raised windows & open doors would permit. Cheerful faces greet me on every hand. At least after rations are issued. Today I eat my entire days ration at a single meal & was hungry when I had finished it. Now I have nothing to eat till we draw again tomorrow. I think I shall not do so any more. It is now getting quite dark & I'll close the book till tomorrow.

Nov. 1st. Sunday. 'Tis a very pretty morning. O how I wish I had my liberty to go out & enjoy it. But when that time will come I dont know.

Well last night I was out upon the steps & asked the guard if he wanted to buy a watch. He courteously invited me down to let him see it by the light of the moon. I did so & walked out of the building for the first time. We did not trade but this morning I sold it to one of the prisoners for \$50. I did hate to part with it but bread is worth more than "time" although tis said that "time is money." Well some of our boys have had money all the time & plenty to eat persistently refusing to lend for fear they might sometime get out. Before I used a cent of mine I loaned two of the boys \$5 each. I dont see how some people can be so selfish. I have often wished I had enough to make them all comfortable. I'm sure I'd do it. Well now that I have money all hands are trying to borrow, among them some who would not accommodate when they might have done so. After all I see that I'm a little revengeful & generally say "I'll see 'em d--d first." I declare it is Sunday & no bread can be bought. So I'll save so much today. And I've sold my jet ring too for \$1.00 and let Orner have the money. This makes \$51 in all received & \$11 loaned.

Like a fool I gave one of the Guards \$10 to buy some sweet potatoes. He came back with \$5 saying "couldn't make change." So I am out a \$5 Confed. Note. Never mind it is only lent for I am bound to steal & rob from Secessionists whenever I can find them till I have made myself good for all I lose by being in the army if it is possible. This resolution is newly formed for I had always entertained some compunctions as to such a course until I am brought to a realization of the fact that stealing at least from the enemy is part of the duties of a soldier. So Rebs, stand from under. I'll never show you any mercy hereafter. There is some commotion in the building. Those on the lower floor are ordered above. I think more prisoners have arrived. This concentration of prisoners from all parts is indicative of something. I hardly know what but hope it is to prepare for our being removed from close confinement. Do for God's sake take us out of this. It is horrible! horrible! Having bought some bread I shall lie down with a full stomach feeling satisfied with the allowance. The first time for two weeks & a day. Bought a plug of tobacco for \$1.00.

A good many are playing cards & checkers. This with all my reverence for the Sabbath I will not allow myself to do. In fact I prefer not to violate the Sabbath more than circumstances seem to demand. The trade I made today I consider justifiable, but gaming would not be. Reasons are apparent. It is now Sunday & a beautiful evening. So let me lie down with thought of the sublimeness & liveliness of nature, Sweet dreams of Eva & a happy future hoping for some good news on the morrow. I sent by Cutler and bought \$5 worth of bread divided it among the men & as is usually the case got the smallest portion myself. I could have bought the whole of it in the N. for 75 cts.

2nd. Monday. Beautiful Indian Summer morning, our boys feeling quite well having enough to eat. I may as well count my \$5 as lost. Well "It's only lent." At noon & the day seems to drag on slowly. I have tried a game or two of chess, but can get up but little interest in the game. Have eaten a piece of bread (25 cts worth) & called it a dinner. I have loaned out so that 24 hours finds \$50 reduced to \$25. What will we do when that is gone. I think I could get along myself but some of the men are much heartier eaters than I am, & they will not be able to bear up under it. The prospects seem good now for our remaining here some time. Perhaps during the war. O, God, I hope not. But if such is for the best I'll try & bear it patiently. Confound the Rebels, why will they persist in their damnable course? If they are clearly wrong why does a just God continue to permit them to continue in evil doing? Will the advocates of the doctrines of Special Providential manifestations & visitations give even a plausible reason? I think I never wished to be out of the army so much as now. There is not in all this house one with whom I can sit & converse in an appreciative conversation & I have no range of companionship. Grossness, Vulgarity, Coarse games & ribald jests & conversation are so common that they fail to shock the ear. But are to me very unpleasant. O what demoralization is consequent upon this war. Will it be possible to restrain the passions of vicious men thus for a while nearly unrestrained when they again return to citizenship? I hope the home influence will at once soften them down. The preponderance will be so great in numbers, that it may if comparatively good succeed. Let us hope for the best. About 3 O.C. we were ordered to pack up & commence marching. When we were halted it was upon the celebrated Belle Island. A small part, about 2 1/2 acres devoted to our camp. I'll leave a description of this horrible filthy place to some other time. Suffice it now that we were turned into its dirty streets to "get along the best we could till morning," without overcoats, blankets or shelter of any kind & only one small stick of wood to ten men. We shivered out the night with but little, & some no sleep. I succeeded myself in crawling into a tent door & lay close to a man so that our latent heat permitted me to sleep 3 hours. After that I walked around till day. Drew for rations three small hard crackers & one ounce of boiled beef each. Confed money wont help here at any price so that I am without funds again. I was appointed Sergt. of a squad this evening, & the charge & care of 100 men so long as we are here devolves upon me. Went to draw rations for the men & while we were bringing it in the "raiders" stole four loaves. Being allowed but one quarter of a loaf to a ration it cut 16 men out of their bread. I divided my own ration & a small loaf I had brought with me so that 5 or 6 got a little.

3rd. Tuesday. It was a very warm & pleasant day. But O how crowded & the

stench around this miserable camp is horrible. However I have got along very well. We had 1/4 loaf of bread & one ounce of meat in the morning & 1/4 loaf of bread & one pint of soup at evening. I shall not "go to bed" hungry, as I was fortunate in getting plenty of meat in our soup for all the men. I took quite a hard cold last night I fear it will rain tonight and if I get no shelter it will be hard to endure. Tents are here but they do not seem to be issuing them yet, & it is near night. I have been considerably annoyed by persons who are not assigned to messes. Chiefs of messes are not altogether honest and crowd out some who have been counted in their messes. There are many sick, once I observed while walking through the camp. They are really in a distressing condition. Far away from home and friends cut off from the assistance our benevolent Government would be glad to give them. Pale, haggard, ragged, dirty & miserable in the extreme. The enemy lends them no more pity or assistance than they would a beast. Poor, poor men, how I do pity them, many of them must die, aye, nearly all, and be buried, with no pitying, sympathizing heart or tearful eye. They die and are buried unknown to their friends. A distant parent and home wonders "how my son is?" The fond wife has not heard from her husband for a long time. Aye, and will not until years perhaps have passed, when by chance as it were, some stranger tells her he knew of his death in the prison camp. The maiden fair wonders in her heart where her lover is. She knows of the hard fought battle in which his Regiment was and learns that he was among the dead upon the field. No he was a prisoner. Carried to this accursed place and had passed away. And the maiden wonders on long years, pines away, droops and is as the faded flower. Her lover does not come. O, Eva, Eva, will it be true with you? Must it be my lot to thus pass my remaining days, when I had pictured in my mind such a happy future with you. No, O, no, God forbid that it should be thus. I will let hope predominate and feel determined that I shall live to escape & see the end of all this trouble. I will always be cheerful in spirits & careful in habits, & trust in a kind Providence. Eva, dear, Send your prayers to almighty God in my behalf, and also, for all our friends, in Union army. I am inclined to a sadness of heart tonight. Dwelling as I am upon it, but adds fuel to the fire. Another incident and I will close tonight. Gen. Neal Dow was passing among the prisoners inquiring after their wants and says the govt. is going to assist them. O, how the hearts of these patriot patient, prisoners did well up and leap with that pride and joy only known to American hearts at the sight and voice of an American Officer. I could not suppress the tears as I witnessed the good it seemed to do them, to see an American Officer in uniform. They may be distressed but they cannot be broken. In their true, loyal - American pride and spirits God bless them and bless the noble heart in Gen. Dow for his interest in their welfare. Without covering tonight though the weather is much more pleasant than last night. I am using up my book too fast as I may be kept here a long time.

Nov. 4th. Wednesday. The day opens bright and clear. I feel better from my cold and the camp disease which has been affecting me some has nearly disappeared. Bread gave out at No. 41, mine being 53 the last. Hope for a "reinforcement" soon, if none arrives we will probably get but one ration today. Only an hour passed till bread arrived and we had our usual ration. Commotion in camp because all taken in July and August were called out to answer to their names. It was rumored that they were to be paroled, but I believe no report but wait for the transaction. I was much pleased with my old acquaintances

from Ohio, Sgt. Wynn & Dan Will from Williams County & Sol Miller. Had a good visit with them. 'Tis near ration time & I will close till tomorrow, or something occurs. The day closes and we lie in our camp street as heretofore secured a shelter for myself but lay upon the cold ground.

Nov. 5th. Thursday. Dark clouds floating high in thick broken scuds, indicates some wind & cooler days. Rain will follow ere long, and then what will we do. We are encouraged this morning by the report that several thousand are to be moved away to Danville, & Lynchburg. This will leave shelter for those that remain. Also that Grant has flanked Bragg & taken Lookout Mt., & that Charleston is about "gone up." These last are said to have been in the Richmond papers last night though I did not see it. Surprised twice, I drawing rations meat gave out so that my squad was the only one without, I went to lunch of bread quite wrathly, but was soon sent for & got meat. One issue had been stolen, but was made up to me. Gen. Dow is back today & a great many boxes, apparently clothing is awaiting shipment across the water. I wonder if it is not for us. Weather breaking away & becoming warmer. I like to have forgotten to mention getting a double ration of bread for myself. I thanked the Q.M. cordially & also for the pains he took to get us our meat. Yes the clothing was for us & was being issued to the men today. But much irregularity prevailed & all kinds of rascality prevailed among our own men in getting more than was their due. Just at night it commenced raining very lightly & we feared we had a hard night before us, but were happily disappointed as little fell.

Nov. 6th. Friday. The weather has broken away this morning somewhat & we hope for more pleasant weather than we anticipated last night but there are some ominous indications of a storm near. I hope all will get blankets & tents too. The day had nearly passed & the clothing all issued. Only about one in ten (10) were issued though a greater number of the actually needy (more) are promised the first of the week. O how tired I am getting of this lying around in the dirt with nothing to read. When will the commissioners come to some terms as to our release either by parole or exchange, however if it serves to the interest of my country better to remain I'll try to be contented but it is hard. The clothing that was issued I learn is furnished through the Christian Mission. We are thankful for their Christian Kindness, but it looks like no extra rations from Uncle Sammies Pantry. Well I can live yet I dont get near enough to eat I suppose Gen. Meredith arrives again today. I have no doubt but something will be accomplished but perhaps not this trip. Eva smiled at me today and I cannot discern the least trace of pity in her countenance, I shall certainly reproach her for her hardness of heart the first opportunity. 'Tis near ration time and I close till morning. The night was clear and cold. We had five sticks of firewood which was all we had to protect us from the outdoor cold. No sleep all night. I was quite unwell from diarrhoea.

Nov. 7th. Sat. All hands feel poorly after so cold a night out of doors without blankets and no sleep the loss has to be made up in part today. The camp ground is being enlarged and tents put up, this looks like shelter tonight, but no shelter comes. All the tents are being put up before occupying any of them which will keep us out of doors until Monday probably. One more man dropped from my squad today which makes two taken out sick to the hospital and one arrested as a deserter from the Reb Army. Our own company keeps remarkably well.

This is fortunate I lay it to their cleanliness and habits of diet. They are thus far very quiet and orderly and the best of feeling prevails among them in fact throughout the entire squad. There has been no quarreling and they look to me so kindly and seem to think I do all I can for them. I had not expected so much good feeling and feel very thankful for it. I have not been well today, but think a good drink of red pepper tea this morning and a piece of camphor helped me. Got another extra large ration for myself tonight. I have but missed two or three times, but dividing it up with the others does me but little good.

Nov. 8th. Sunday. The air is cold and raw though the night was warmer than we expected. Last night some 10 of the men escaped with two of the guards. One was killed & 2 more wounded. It is reported that Bragg has been thoroughly beaten. The Richmond papers do not speak of it in that manner. They are silent too about Charleston while it is rumored that it has surrendered. There is apparently some excitement & movement in Rebel military circles. Soldiers of some kind were passing on cars but could not tell whether Reb troops of our prisoners. Hope we shall be able to learn today. Bought \$5 worth of tobacco & divided with the men. Was small enough to sell fish on ration (my extra) for ten cents & bought some "Richmond Coffee" so that I made quite a breakfast at 12 O.C. M on bread, beef, & rye coffee. Corn bread was issued to 3100 wheat bread to 300 when all gave out for two or three hours. I feel strong in the faith that we will not be kept prisoners more than two weeks more. I dont believe the Rebel government can afford to keep us. They have ceased to enlarge the camp, refused letters to be sent away & many more substantial though not easily described reasons for thinking as I do. O wont we be happy crowd when once on board a Transport for our lines. God grant the day will come soon.

Nov. 9th. Monday. Last night was very cold, & yet the authorities would not let the men occupy the tents that were already pitched. So some 1800 men lay in the street with but a small fire. It was really shivering their life away. If God is just in punishing nations & men for their sins, surely this so-called Southern Confederacy will have much yet to bear. I believe He is & that a terrible retribution is awaiting. We have been prisoners now three weeks & a day, that is those captured when I was. We have endured much suffering from hunger & cold yet there are many who have been here since the great battle of Gettysburg. They have endured longer but little more than we. They had warm weather & most of the time tents & have the latter yet. They have also secured many blankets while we have none. The clothing issued by Gen. Dow the other day was also given them as they were near destitute so they are comparatively comfortable. But we are really suffering. The night passed, high cold winds, a little rain & snow falling make it terrible for the poor fellows lying out of doors. To make it worse, all we had to eat the whole day was four ounces of corn bread. Double rations promised in the morning - - -

November 10th. Tuesday. The clouds have passed away but the wind continues high, our men were many of them without wood as well as shelter. They are chilled through and in a suffering condition. My heart bleeds for them & would to God I could alleviate their sufferings. But I am in as bad condition as the rest with no power to do anything. The morning paper today states that it is known that Meade has orders to hunt Lee and fight him. That he has already

captured 3 to 5000 prisoners I sincerely hope he will be thoroughly successful & that it will assist in our liberation. We are literally freezing and starving. Surely our country will not permit it much longer. We must have something done or all shall perish in a little while. All but about 500 are now in tents, but without blankets or wood the cold is intense but why speak so discouragingly, when I feel so confident we shall not be detained but a few days. I still feel sure of this. So drive away sorrow, despair & despondency. Come in faith, hope & cheerfulness. Our sufferings are but for a few days. This being the darkest just before the bursting in of the joyful news of our liberation, "So let the wide world wag as it will I will try and be cheerful still." But the night drawn nigh cold and cheerless rations of corn bread and boiled bacon are issued late.

Nov. 11. Wednesday. The morning is clear & cold and the suffering among the prisoners was intense. From 300 to 400 lay out of doors with no protection from the cold, and those in tents have to lie upon the ground which is damp and cold. My God is there no help for this. Does the best interest of our country really demand it, if so, God grant cheerful resignation upon our part. We are pleased to learn that some were taken away early this morning. This number being variously estimated from 50 to 500. I think about 100 to 200 correct. Well it looks as if something was being done. Though the commencement is small when there are 11,000 or 12,000 to be disposed of. Rice & meat both gave out at supper & a large portion of corn bread was issued to those without. I got more for my squad than they could eat, thankful.

Nov. 12. Thursday. The morning clear & cool but more moderate than yesterday. It is stated in the Richmond papers that Raleigh N.C. has been captured by our forces like (here it is undecipherable) move but success in the movement of our forces. It does look like the Reb. Govt. must cave in soon. Some 600 more prisoners are brought to this miserable camp this morning but no more shelter. O dear, O dear, what shall we do. Two men were carried from camp dead. They were denied admittance to the hospital & so have perished. O Jeff Davis call on almighty God for his assistance to sustain your rotten invention of a government. It is all a mockery & but bringing a greater curse upon you when the day of retribution shall have come. I dreamed of Eva last night, it was a sweet & pleasant dream. I thought I made her a visit "in my suit of blue" & that we were finally married before we came back. I thought that we were really happy. I awoke & it was all a dream & I in this miserable prison camp. O how sad I did feel, but will live in hopes for the best. It often seems as if it would be such a relief if I could but write to her & receive her sweet interesting neat little love letters. But even this is denied me. Our rations for the day were, 3 ozs. boiled rice for breakfast, at noon we got ration of bread, at night we got no sweet potatoes as did many of the squads but double of corn & rye bread.

Nov. 13. Friday. A very pleasant morning with a fair nights rest & a strong hope that we will not be kept here a great while. Quite a commotion in camp, all the sick were taken out. A similar move being made about a year ago when all others were marched out and afterward paroled. Have but little hope that such good luck will immediately attend us. Clothing issued to men today, about 150 sick men taken out of camp. Very many for the time of year. Reported that

Meade Hd. Qts are at Orange C.H. Ropes seem to be tightening up on the Reb. Govt. Have been lucky in rations for squad and self. Night drawing nigh. Sold tonight on rations. Only raw potatoes & bread (?)

Nov. 14. Saturday. Pleasant weather continues. Not a cloud to be seen but upon the countenances of the more discouraged here, & who can really blame them. Some have been here several months, are getting very destitute of everything with no evidences of relief from their imprisonment soon. They are becoming very emaciated, many having died. Yesterday 8 were taken out of the camp dead. How many from among "the sick in the hospital" I have no means of knowing. What is there to buoy up their flagging spirits, nothing, but patriotism and resolution. I declare when I look upon the sad scene around me I feel very like yielding to despair myself, But knowing this to be one of the surest ways to dissolution & destruction I rekindle the diminishing spark of resolution & reiterate my determination to outlive it all & go to my friends once more. Very good dish of rice and corn bread this morning, making it into a quart of warm soup assisted me very much. Indications of a storm are visible in the conditions of the atmosphere. Think it will be rain. I am getting quite weak from want of enough to eat and some exposure have half a mind to write to Eva and see if I cannot get an answer, but thinking we shall be removed either to some other place of imprisonment or to our lines are long I will postpone it a while longer. Heard that Meade has advanced to Orange C.H. captured Fredricksburg, 1800 prisoners, 16 guns & warping it to the Rebs generally. God be praised if it is true. Also reported today that there is a change of commissions on exchange and parole, I predict that this looks to an immediate understanding. Hopes revive though yet deferred. Small rations of corn bread only for supper.

Nov. 15th. Sunday. Commenced raining & just at dark & rained all night. Many men could not get into tents and suffered much. This morning the heavens are overcast with clouds while it rains at times the prospect is gloomy enough. The Q.M. gave out a little wood to make fires for those who were in the rain to dry themselves by, but those in tents no matter how worn and poor the tents were got none. This so-called Confederate government must be in very straitened circumstances or devoid of all civilized intentions to treat prisoners of war in the manner we are treated. I am inclined to think the former the principal cause while the latter doubtless has its influence we got no breakfast till 1 O.C. then ration of bread and two of meat. Uncle Sam has sent us 34,000 ration plates, cups & spoons so reported from a source to be credited. Weather breaks away early in the day and becomes quite pleasant with a cool drying breeze. Clothing is yet being issued & done in a very neat & systemized method. It begins to look as if no arrangement had been made or is likely to be made for our release. However I shall continue to hope as usual, till deliverance does really come. Corn bread alone for supper.

Nov. 16th. Monday. Another fine day overhead and prospects of fair weather ahead 'tis really a blessing. This makes a month and a day of my captivity when taken I expected to have been inside our lines, exchanged or paroled long ere this & my hopes were good. Now the day seems as distant as ever, even more so. Save that I do not think our government will permit so many of her

brave men to remain in so distressing condition during the winter. I have now determined to think that so soon as the Fall campaigns have ended then the attentions will be turned to those who have been unfortunate in falling into the hands of the enemy. Perhaps it were as well to make no such calculations, but the mind wants something to speculate upon and what more apropos than our deliverance. Cutler was taken away sick today.

Nov. 17th. Tuesday. The night set in quite clear and warm but it commenced raining near midnight after a brisk shower it becomes cold and this morning it is cloudy, cold, damp, & very cheerless. It will be a gloomy, dismal day on Belle Island. Camp disease prevailed more than usual last night and much suffering was felt. Nearly all the squads have got a share of blankets. Ours got 50 which makes them more comfortable. Toward night the weather became more moderate. Our supper is late & very poor, corn meal soup.

Nov. 18th. Wednesday. The weather is much more pleasant this morning, but O dear how sick I was last night with this terrible camp disease. I have not suffered more in one night since I came into the army. Vomiting & purging all night and nearly all day. In the morning I ate nothing but drank a cup of red pepper tea about noon, ate a small piece of ginger cake and drank a pint of rye coffee and begin to feel better. In the evening felt quite sick & had but persisted in eating nothing. Intend to starve out the disease but what shall I do to requite upon. No bread but this miserable trash Indian meal soup and sweet potatoes all but the latter well calculated to make one worse instead of better. My God it is perfectly horrible yet I shall live through it but am determined that it shall be my last service as an enlisted man. I will have a commission or a discharge I have done enough, suffered enough & deserve some recompense besides the small monthly pay.

Nov. 19th. Thursday. Fair weather overhead and could we be where Uncle Sam could care for us would feel quite contented. But here it is every man for himself, little chance to extend any sympathy to our suffering companions. I feel much better in the morning & only need something fit to eat as it is it seems almost impossible to revive from a fit of sickness. I must rely upon my own broken constitution & resolution & ever prevailing hopes. These are always better than medicine, even for disease, no I shall not die here. My predecessors all lived to a good old age to do good and bless mankind. I am not made to die younger than they. Good news reported this morning, 7000 to leave for our lines in a day or two. I dont quite believe it but yet it may be so, hope it is, for heavens sake. Felt quite comfortable all day but must have worried around too much as I felt quite weak at night. Succeeded in trading my corn bread for some wheat bisquit. This with a cup of coffee & 1/4 of a miserable peach pie made my supper.

Nov. 20th. Friday. The weather continues very favorable. But I am failing quite fast my complaint is much better but strength is reduced. This morning I succeeded in trading my rations for four small bisquits of wheat. I broke them into hot rye coffee & they tasted very good. They were better than those I had last night, I hope I shall continue to be as lucky, if so I shall get along, but it is enough to discourage the stoutest heart. O how I hope they

will get an arrangement by which all can be sent to our lines. It is the one thing desirable here, but the interest of the govt. must be served (?) though we sicken and die. Evening came very warm.

Nov. 21st. Saturday. Rain commenced falling very lightly about sunrise. O I do wish for a better place than this if the winter storms are setting in. News of our exchange are rife also that govt. rations have come for us. Their indications are antagonistic so whether we are to stay or leave is uncertain. I feel somewhat better today but I am only able to just walk around a little. I am very weak. Hope that the worst is over and that I shall begin to gain but I need a hearty diet which I cannot get here. I ate cornbread this morning the first for two days having traded my rations for wheat bisquit, but all the cooking in the south is alike. I have never found in but one family a decent cook. They cannot make even passable bread of any kind. That lady was Mrs. Ott of Bolivar who was raised and learned to cook in the North. Away with the Sunny South I have enough of it.

Nov. 22. Sunday. A disagreeable night was passed in camp last night. It rained all night, some of the time very hard. I was completely wet through in the morning, but not withstanding felt quite well, having had quite a respectable breakfast of wheat cakes & toast of light wheat bread. It has cleared away in the morning and is really quite pleasant, but sickness and hunger is taking all the poetry out of me, though that was but little. Nothing to eat but corn bread with cold water to drink.

Nov. 23. Monday. It was clear and cold in the morning but before noon clouds overcast the sky and the air became colder. By two O.C. rain set in & the wretched starving soldiers were again suffering for the wants of the necessities of life. However they are more (?) comfortable than formerly as nearly all are being quite well clothed & the balance will be as soon as they can be secured. My squad was called out today & got everything in the line of clothing they actually needed but overcoats. I hope I shall be away from here before they are ready to issue them. But the prospect is rather discouraging although I cannot convince myself that we shall be compelled to stay here till spring. The sickness in camp I notice has somewhat abated. The cool weather I think is the principal cause. I am much better myself today. I think now that with proper care I shall regain my health. Govt. has actually sent us some rations. But the rascally Rebel officers permitted their own soldiers on guard around us to be well filled with it before the hungry prisoners got a taste. Well, they were hungry too for there is but little more issued to them than to us. The rest they have to buy. They have the chance to do so while we do not. Wonder if our Govt. will retaliate as the affair was promptly reported to the officers issuing clothing & will surely reach our lines. Corn bread only for supper.

Nov. 24th. Tuesday. A light but cold rain is falling this morning but the stomachs of the men were quite well filled with cornbread & pork & beef sent by old Uncle Sam. This will counteract the disagreeable weather in part, but men ought always to have enough to satisfy hunger. My health is very much improved. So I think while lying still but when I get up & try to exercise

I find there is little strength left in me. A lively report today that there is to be an immediate exchange of prisoners. I'll believe it when we are removed from here to City Point & slow to place full confidence in the report till then. Our officers are not over today issuing clothing as usual. Wonder what that means. I don't think the light storm would deter them. This is flag of truce boat day. I just dare to think it might be so but not jubilant yet. Wish I could get to a comfortable fire in a comfortable position once more. I am very cold. My feet are suffering.

Nov 25th. Wednesday. Cold, raw & cloudy. Stormed a little just at night but before morning it cleared away. Was quite sick all day but drew the ration for the squad.

Nov. 26th. Thursday. Thanksgiving day in all loyal parts of our country. My mind is forcibly carried back over the past, to contrast it with my Thanksgiving dinner on Belle Island. Even but a year ago, while a soldier, I was hospitably entertained by Mrs. Boynton near Grand Rapids & a better filled table I never saw. I remember the Lambs, Turkeys, Pigs, Pastry, Jellies & Fruit of all kinds, devoured in years past. I remember the genuine Prayers, Praise, & Thanksgiving, to almighty God for His Kindness, the gayety, mirthfulness, & almost universal happiness of the youthful. The generous donations to the poor, aye everything customary in our Christian, loyal America. But these things seem to have all departed from me as if by some magic influence. We had dinner here to subsist upon the usual allowance of poor cornbread & meat, unless one is lucky enough to trade his rations for a cake or pie which may be found for sale upon the camp streets. I wonder if our president does really think of us in our misfortune here today & if he is not thinking of some honorable mode to accomplish our release. I believe him to be generous, kind & not unmindful, of the wants of the people & if that he really is thinking of Belle Island. O people of America let now your prayers ascend to almighty God for the end of this cruel war & our deliverance from the miserable captivity. Join ye in one accord let all disloyalty & divisions be banished to secure the one great desideratum. I see no immediate prospect of release. I fear we are to remain till the end of the war. If so, God have mercy upon us, for it is the policy of these rebels to let us so far famish that our hearts & spirits are so far broken, that if ever, it will be a long time before we are or can be fit for duty in the field, before relief is granted. Well with such prospects ahead with this book so nearly full, I must economize still more, barely making an entry of dates & leading events & leave it to be filled up whenever it shall please God & my country to grant me more ample time & means.

Nov. 27th. Friday. Rain & rain, cold day, everyone consequently cross & ugly. Squad becomes dissatisfied about my management & I told them to get some one else to act as squad sergeant. I feel sorry for the half famished men, yet it does seem as if they might use a little more reason than many of them do. Well the time will come though it may be distant when we shall be away from here and then these things will be mostly forgotten. But those who have borrowed money of me until I loaned myself out & then have abused me I never will forget. Our rations were short tonight.

Nov. 28th. Saturday. Disagreeable rainy day. Short rations of bread and beef in A.M. Relieving myself from duty. Eat what little I got after that miserable cuss of a Payne cheated me out of a portion & then layed around in the tent & tending to my camp disease. Reb troops seem to be coming from the direction of Petersburg, reported that Grant has badly beaten Bragg & conflicting rumors concerning Burnside that he is captured with 7000 men & that he is O.K. near Petersburg. That a great battle must be fought between Meade and Lee. O God give us victory & then release us from this miserable place. Hope yet to be out yet no evidence that we shall.

Nov. 29th. Sunday. Rain cold wind & decidedly the most unpleasant day passed on the Island. I am in poor health and yet was compelled to stand out in the cold storm while we were rearranged into squads again. I took a long jump from the 53d to the 9th. Sgt. Howard of the 20th N.Y.S.M. who is decidedly a gentleman after my own heart in main respects has agreed to try with me to get out of this. We are both sick, completely used up & should go out while we can. I do hope fortune will favor us once again. I think him in earnest in seeking a new home in the west, and he has agreed to visit Big Rapids positively. It is natural to build castles in the air & we have anticipated some fine times when this cruel war is over & we are located as citizens in Mecosta Co., Mich.

Nov. 30th. Monday. A little rain & very raw cold day. No wood & nothing for supper but the usual 2 ozs. of meat. It does almost seem as if this infernal Confederate Government desires the reduction of our numbers & was accomplishing it in this slow & barbarous manner of murdering us. I know they are hard pressed by our armies on all sides & their means cut very close but they might certainly furnish us with wood to warm us & our rations. O why are we kept here suffering so. We had to lie in our miserable tents rolled in our blankets to keep from freezing. Heavy firing was heard all day in the direction of Culpepper until late in the evening. It is said a great battle is coming off between Lee & Meade. I am hopeful as to the result & shall trust in providence.

Dec. 1st. Tuesday. Six weeks & two days a prisoner & four weeks on this island. I was in medium health when captured. Just recovered from my hurt in the June fight & the camp disease which annoyed me nearly all summer. The march fatigue, Starvation, & miserable food brought the diarrhoea back upon me. It has been very bad ever since, I am now just able to walk around camp a little. Can scarcely lift my feet over an ordinary stick of wood. The weather is cold though clear today & I cannot exercise enough to warm my blood so I go to my tent roll in my blanket to keep warm & think of the good things I used to eat, the happy home I left behind, the bright prospects, I have so often conjured up I was to enjoy in another happy home with Eva, who looks at me smiling on me as ever with no pity in her countenance, while hunger is gnawing at my vitals & cold is pinching me. Nothing but corn bread for supper.

Dec. 2nd. Wednesday. Weather more fair & comfortable, roused out of our nests & had to stand in the cold till we were all counted in at two gates. Wonder if it is not to find out the number to exchange. Guess not. Nothing to eat in the A.M. 250 more prisoners brought in last night. Poor fellows had no blankets & no tents. Fighting going on near Gordonsville, so reported sent to Camp Deans for rations.

Dec. 3rd. Thursday. Was quite warm & had I not been very unwell last night & today, should have thought it was very pretty weather. I became almost discouraged on account of the again declining health. In the P.M. it was reported the guards were to have 3 days rations tomorrow to take us to City Point. Dont believe a word of it.

Dec. 4th. Friday. Opens fair & warm for the season of year. All hands out again to be recounted & resquadded. Presume the Q.M. had lost a load of corn bread. Its worth looking after in this d--d bogus government. Rested well last night & feel better this morning than for a long time which is quite encouraging. Got a load of wheat bread to eat before ration time which helped to keep me up. Am becoming very much attached to Sergt. Howard who sleeps with me & we are fast becoming boon companions even in our trials & tribulations. He sure is earnest about going to Big Rapids to live. I sincerely hope he will as I am convinced he will make just such a valuable citizen as is wanted in that (undecipherable) lot. O heaven grant that these bright anticipations may be realized.

Dec. 5th. Saturday. Day opens calm, clear, & beautiful for the season. I am better in body & spirits than for a long time & ate a good breakfast of bread, butter & molasses, bologna, sausage & Washington pie which made me feel still better. Good reports that a portion of us are to be exchanged. I do not think it reliable although it was announced in the Richmond Whig. Soap was issued to us today, I guess we all wanted to clean up, well it is time. Irish potatoes were given to some of the squads. Really the Confederacy is becoming extravagant to us Yankee prisoners. But towards night I began to feel worse & passed a very miserable night. The weather changing somewhat also & becoming colder made it very unpleasant to be up as much as I was compelled to.

Dec. 6th. Sunday. Clear & pleasant but quite cold. Was sick all day eating only a small piece of meat, bread & molasses. O how terrible to live in such a place as this. My God is there no help. Keep my bunk all day.

Dec. 7th. Monday. Clearer & colder than yesterday & I was much sicker. Answered to the Drs. Call & got some powders, it checked my Diarrhoea. At night I took another which corrected me, in a short time. Was stupid all night from the medicine & was not up all during the night but suffered from the cold.

Dec. 8th. Tuesday. Beautiful morning & the weather much more moderate. I feel much better & my spirits are also revived. Am prepared to eat & did eat a good healthy breakfast of sweet potatoes, meat & onions stewed together & a cup of U.S. coffee but felt worse toward night.

Dec. 9th. Wednesday. Was not near so well today & had to lie in my blankets all day. Eat nothing for breakfast nor till night when I eat one hard tack, having drawn just half a ration in addition to our usual ration of corn bread & sweet potatoes. This hard bread evidently from our lines & being an extra I conclude is sent by our government. Rested quite well during the night feeling better by noon, hope yet to get along well.

Dec. 10th. Thursday. Feel much better again but shall worry around as little

as possible. Soaked their hard tack in cold water till soft, then poured in more water, salted well & steamed well. I like them very well. The soup thus made was quite good at least so it seemed to me. Good reports are in circulation about exchanges. I shall permit myself to hope a little although my former hopeful disposition had given way to a conviction that there was no probable prospect of our immediate release. I am not discouraged, but that I shall see the end, though I am quite low. Writing this as I lie in my miserable bed. I took a thorough wash on Tuesday in the open & I attribute the exposure (not the washing) as part of the cause of my feeling somewhat worse.

Dec. 11th. Friday. Weather rain & rather uncomfortable & I am not feeling better, after eating quite a breakfast of stewed crackers & crust coffee, conclude to keep as quiet as possible. But O dear, it does require a stout heart to keep from being utterly discouraged, & yet if I allow myself to indulge in such feeling I shall assuredly go down. I do wonder if it is the final conclusion of our Countries officers to let us remain till the contest is decided by force of arms. If so our release may be near at hand but it appears far more distant than our constitutions will bear up under the treatment we receive here. I do not intend to think hard of my country or her rulers but this suffering is very trying to the soul. O, Lord, remember those here that fought so bravely for a noble cause & do not forsake them in this time of need. I must not fail here to mention the kindness I have received at the hands of Danny Will from Bryan, Ohio, he has done me several favors, today he brought me a sweet Rusk well buttered, O my but it did taste good. Large numbers of express boxes have arrived for the prisoners today.

Dec. 12th. Saturday. Weather rather more favorable. But I was really worse today. Went out to the Dr. & got some medicine. Eat nothing all day but a cracker & a half with two spoons of sugar. My physic worked off during the evening & night & I hope not to pass another day as sick & unpleasant as I did this.

Dec. 13th. Sunday. Rained about half the night but it was warm & I did rest well after so sick a day yesterday. My appetite is somewhat demanding & I must have plate of toast so here goes for one, such as I had to make it in this camp.

Dec. 14th. Monday. Did not rest quite so well last night. This morning the weather is colder & somewhat invigorating. I go & get some more medicine & a cup of good beef tea. Felt better when I find the last a little too much & could eat no supper.

Dec. 15th. Tuesday. Was trotted out several times during the night & got wonderful hungry before morning. Forged an order a German takes it & gets my beef tea, any port in a storm like this & must not be too honest. Decidedly unpleasant winter day.

Dec. 16th. Wednesday. Was so much better that I feel highly encouraged. Appetite much improved beef tea works well. Have plenty of it, had a good supper of fried bread. Was somewhat disappointed in not hearing from Lt. Moore to

whom I sent for a little money. Begin to look for boxes from the company. Storm approaching.

Dec. 17th. Thursday. Raining this morning but I feel quite smart, much better than I had dared to hope for. My rations are getting too small again, I must get in extra soup some way.

Dec. 18th. Friday. Felt remarkably well all day, but could not get enough to eat. Beef tea game having played out. They take it all down to the hospital & issue it there. The officers are issuing clothing & yet I get no word from Lt. Moore. Perhaps it has been forgotten. I am almost out of tobacco & don't know what I shall do. Cannot get enough to eat let alone trading rations for such things.

Dec. 19th. Saturday. Came out this morning to see a nice clear but rather cold morning. Took a good wash & got already for a breakfast but when ration call was sounded it was announced that no rations would be issued till 3 O.C. Cool I declare when a fellow is so cussed hungry. Well I am really becoming disgusted at the manner in which we are made to suffer here. No wood & nothing to eat. Well perhaps there is an excuse. The river is very high & it is perilous to get anything across but they have no business to keep us in so inaccessible a place, some secret monitor tells me we shall be kept here but a short time longer. Wonder if it is only a delusion. There must be an end to it sometime, why not soon, I'll allow a real hope to revive me.

Dec. 20th. Sunday. Nothing more than the usual routine of prisoners suffering.

Dec. 21st. Monday. Lively reports of Lincoln's Proclamation of Amnesty. The armistice of thirty days & our immediate exchange. The camp was wild with excitement towards night & I almost believed them on account of the tolling of the city bells which we heard.

Dec. 22nd. Tuesday. Just as might be expected the reports prove entirely false weather for several days past cold & wintry like but no snow.

Dec. 23rd. Wednesday. Some flakes of snow falling the first I have seen but we get no breakfast & no apparent reason why. It does beat the Devil that we must fare so damnably.

Dec. 24th. Thursday. I am gaining now quite readily & begin to hope that I shall gain strength enough to do something to make extra rations. Have been hoping I could have something extra for dinner tomorrow but see no light.

Christmas. And nothing but the usual rations & as hungry as a poor dog. Well it is the poorest & most cheerless Christmas that I ever experienced & that I ever expect to. The weather which has been very cold has moderated somewhat & we hope for better times even on Belle Isle. All sorts of rumors continue to circulate relative to Paroles & exchanges but the cautious mind has schooled itself to become incredulous. So I believe nothing & wait for events & facts.

Dec. 27th. Sunday. Was really the dawning of a better day although the weather was rather Lowry & unpromising yet the hearts of the prisoners were much cheered

when 500 men were called out & left us under the announcement that they were exchanged & that all were to be as fast as transportation could be procured. Yesterday there was nothing occurred more than the usual camp routine today all was excitement over the good news. Well this is rather conclusive to me that some understanding has been arrived & as there was no selection of prisoners the arrangement is a general one. O glory - glory. I do now hope in good earnest to see the end of my captivity soon.

Dec. 28th. Monday. The day passes away & we are still here. It begins to look rather discouraging again, especially to me as my health is again growing poorer instead of better but yet I'll continue to hope on.

Dec. 29th. Tuesday. Nothing of importance worth chronicling.

Dec. 30th. Wednesday. Will record the same as yesterday only that the day was the most pleasant of any for a long time. It was quite warm indeed.

Dec. 31st. Thursday. Was a marked change from yesterday. A cold rainstorm lasting all day & we but a small allowance of wood. During the night the water ran in so that it was an inch or two deep where I lay. I have wished many times since I have been here that I had quarters as comfortable as my Father's hogs but actually I have not.

NEW YEARS 1864. And we are yet here upon this accursed Island. O how many anxious ones here had hopes to have spent this day with their friends at home or at least with friends in our own lines instead of which we are dragging out a miserable existence as prisoners of war & I doubt if any prisoners were ever before treated by any people professing to be a civilized nation as are the prisoners here. Thrown into old ragged tents without any bedding, blankets or any thing of the kind. Our allowance of food is about the 1/4 what our own government allows us. It is enough so that a hearty man will not actually starve but not enough to prevent the rapid contracting of disease. Why O, why is this permitted. I have often been exhorted to place my entire confidence & trust in Providence in all kinds of emergency. That He would be our "stay & our support." would care for, protect & provide. No we are here. The enemies cannon is in position to rake us at the first indication of a mutiny. There is no opportunity to assist ourselves can Providence. Will He do anything to relieve us, by our lending him our blind submissive confidence. Well there is yet considerable hope that we shall be relieved soon. So I will not commence to murmur against God and my country yet.

Jan'y 2nd. Saturday. Nothing new only the weather is now fair but cold & we have no wood. Yesterdays labors stewing bones brought me all I wanted to eat in wheat bread & flour gravy. I wanted yesterday as a New Years dinner but malicious ill health for a few days caused it to be one day late but better late than never.

Sunday, Jan'y 3rd. Had an extra ration of cornbread today & am gaining strength rapidly. O, if I could only get enough to eat I would get right up I know full well, but if relief does not come soon I fear I shall certainly sink as have so many before me who were probably as rugged as I was.

Monday, Jan'y 4th. The weather is growing colder & wood seems to be failing us. Our large supply in the tent is gone & they do not issue us more I have frozen my feet already lying in bed & if the weather gets much colder I fear we shall nearly freeze to death or suffer worse than death.

Tuesday, Jan'y 5th. The weather still growing colder. My feet so sore that I laid in the bed all day. O, my God, is there no help.

Wednesday, Jan'y 6th. Same as yesterday.

Thursday, Jan'y 7th. We got a small ration of bread & meat for breakfast. Ration of bread, meat & butter crackers for supper. O them butter crackers, how good they did taste. I never ate anything that I relished so well or so it seemed. Tonight there was quite a fall of snow, say three inches. Of course the weather is a little more moderate on us prisoners no wood & freezing.

Friday, Jan'y 8th. After the storm it is clear & cold. The old 53rd. squad was called out for clothing & I had to stand weak & emaciated as I am & with frozen feet from 11 O.C. till nearly 2 O.C. till all had drawn. I did not get an overcoat as I expected but got a new shirt. I put in on & slept between it & for a long time the night being the coldest yet. I suffered with my feet till 11 O.C. when I raised up chafed my feet till they became warm & comfortable.

Saturday, Jan'y 9th. It has been reported that no boat from our lines had arrived for two weeks. I think it is so for no mail has been received in this camp. This morning our mail has arrived & some express boxes which indicate that it has arrived but brought in transports with Reb prisoners dampened our prospects for a few days more. I do believe that every possible obstacle is thrown in the way of our release, but by whom is it done. Surely our government which has always cared with so generously a hand would not willingly let us suffer so much without an effort to relieve us. I wonder who the new commission to arrange a (undecipherable) or effect & exchange is to be. It has been reported that Butler was appointed but Secesh representatives refused to hold any intercourse with him. Will our Govt. slide him off & appoint another or quarrel a long time over it. If a quarrel & we are kept here in consequence I shall certainly disown them. Well if the Boat is really here we shall hear something with regards to it soon though how reliable we are always at a loss to know.

Sunday, Jan'y 10th., 1864. It proves that no boat has as yet arrived at least we have it & everything goes to indicate that such is the case. At all events we are here & no signs of being any where else soon. My feet are getting better & so is my health generally & I manage to get something extra nearly every day. Weather quite cold.

Monday, Jan'y 11th. Nothing has occurred of particular importance today so we will let it pass with this brief notice.

Tuesday, Jan'y 12th. Will pass this day the same as yesterday.

Wednesday, Jan'y 13th. Time passes on the same as usual. It will not pay to mention every camp rumor afloat so with my mentioning the sale of beef tea for several days past to raise the Extra & some slight hope that we may yet get away from here soon. Butler has probably been relieved & it is rumored that Burnside will succeed him.

Thursday 14th (Jan'y). Up in the morning early at work boiling bones sold 25 cts. worth & had all I wanted for breakfast. Diarrhoea coming back on me again so I guess I shall require less ration today & for a few days to come than I have been even. News at night are rather encouraging. Butler instead of being superceded has been recognized by the Rebel Government as the commission on Exchange & that we are to be paroled immediately which means in a few weeks. This news comes late in the evening & for the present as a camp rumor. Nothing more.

Friday, Jan'y 15th. As on yesterday was up in the morning as soon as it was light but could not sell anything luck seeming to have turned against me as I had been having remarkable good luck peddling heretofore. So I carried my merchandise back to my quarters & retired from business for the day. The news of yesterday is revived & considerable confidence seems to be placed in it. I have but little.

Saturday, Jan'y 16th. Feel quite poorly again today, was troubled a good deal last night but was somewhat better through the day than during the night. O dear, the news is discouraging again today although it seems that a Boat has arrived at City Point from Baltimore. But hope shall not fail, let reports be what they may.

Sunday, Jan'y 17th. Last night got a little wheat flour, stirred it into my rice soup stewing it well then sliced in my coarse bread & had a good hearty supper & one which checked my Diarrhoea very much. This morning we got a good rice soup & made a good breakfast but we don't get enough at night, we got nothing but a ration of bread & we all go to bed hungry, very hungry and the prospect of release no nearer apparently than it has been. Shaved my face clean today the first time since I was a soldier.

Monday, Jan'y 18th. Lying in bed until after 9 O.C. in the morning waiting for (undecipherable) call. I commenced writing to pass away the time. It is three months since I was captured. Then I expected that all enlisted men would be paroled or exchanged & returned to our lines. We were full of health, heart, hope & spirits, we were fleshy, having known but little of hunger, we were confident in our ability to endure almost anything. Now we are down, clear down, starved out. Our flesh as well as hope & spirits are all broken or nearly so. We get peevish & irritable, cross dirty & careless. Eat like beasts, our faces & hands begrimed with dirt & pine smoke & but little inclination to wash them or strength if we had. The weather has been so cold & we with so little wood that we cannot wash but upon warmer days. Yesterday being quite a pleasant one all hands shaved up & took a good wash. This morning it stormed some, am so hungry & faint that I shall do as upon many similar occasions, let it go. Well I'll dry up the writing till the day is passed but I presume this will be made for the day.

Tuesday, 19th. Nothing to eat today but one pound of cornbread & one pt. of U.S. coffee. I am too weak to make any effort to raise any extra & what I shall do I don't know. Well I guess Secesh is bound to starve us at all events.

Wednesday, 20th. One lb. corn bread & half lb. Irish potatoes. I go to bed seemingly nearly famished with hunger. My appetite is craving & I can't get enough to gratify it. O my God what shall I do & yet I don't think or can I make myself believe but what I shall yet come out all right.

Thursday, Jan'y 21st, 1864. was at first provoked by drawing first 2 ozs rice & 1/2 lb Corn bread but agreeably disappointed when the best bean soup was added. I ate about 1/3 of my soup traded the balance for an issue of rice & made my cup full of a splendid cup of rice. Let us see 1 pt. beans, 1 1/2 rice, & 1/2 lb cornbread, a very fair breakfast, I could live on such rations. But this rice is an Extra furnished by our own Govt. & when we shall get any more God only knows, why don't we get more to eat.

Friday, Jan'y 22nd, 1864. Our fair (fare) continually decreasing & I am so weak I almost despond lest I may yield to the cravings of hunger & sink.

Friday, 23. Nothing new from yesterday.

Saturday, 24th. Same only the weather is getting warm & springlike.

Saturday, 25th. Sold my Masonic pin today for \$10, Confed \$1.00, U.S. bought rice & molasses & went to selling them, made \$3.00 (Confed) first day & felt much encouraged. What was better our rations were nearly doubled & I went to bed with a full stomach & slept soundly, having left Old Howard as he is called by all the boys bunking with our (undecipherable) boys.

Sunday, 26th. Hi ho got a letter from Eva, the first I have received since my capture. O bless you Eva, ever faithful & true. I'll try & be to you a good kind husband with God's permission. Weather very warm & springlike.

Monday, 27th. Rice business dull today & did not make anything but kept my capital good & had enough to eat. That is more than I can do every day.

Tuesday, 28th. Wound up the business today by selling what stock I had on hands & will try Rations with a small addition. Forgot to mention the receipt of a letter from Cap. Dean promising boxes of provisions & money. The money is now due.

Wednesday, 29th.

Friday, 29th. Wrote or rather sent letter to Cap. Dean & Eva writing yesterday & day before. Gave note to Sergt. Hill concerning express boxes. Weather conditions warm & springlike, very much so. Took a thorough wash today all over.

Sat. Jan'y 30th. Events transpired in the order recorded though I got the days of the week somewhat mixed. This morning the sky was over cast with clouds &

the air raw & disagreeable. My old camp complaint is again around me. The news nearly nothing. Have been thinking seriously of writing to Father for a box of provisions. Guess I will as soon as I can get some paper.

Sunday, Jan'y 31. Nothing new. Our usual corn dodger as we have long since denominated our ration of corn bread with soup generally of Rice or the "pea bean." They continue to hand out larger rations than formerly.

Monday, Feb'y 1st. Will say 'tis the same as yesterday only the weather changed for the worse.

Tuesday, 2nd. And the same began⁷ today.

Wednesday, 3. And still another day the same, why encumber the pages with more only there is fairer weather again.

Thursday, 4th. Hereafter I shall not try to keep a daily record of events as this book is nearly full & I don't know how to keep (get?) another. Suffice it to say here that general prospects of our release do not increase except as time passing brings us nearer to an end perhaps our own in time I shall therefore wait till something new turns up & note it down as it occurs upon the line.

Tuesday, 9th (Feb'y). After several days of fair but cool weather & this one being spent as usual, all hands were greeted with surprise by a brass band striking the "Mocking Birds" at the front. All hands prophesied some good news were in store for us, but it proved that they had only come over to have a drink with the lieutenant comdr. here & they kept it up till the wee small hours of the morning.

Wednesday, 10th (Feb'y). I am quite poorly today but finished another Counterfeit Confed. bill. For a week passed this is the way I keep up extra rations. Pretty business for me making counterfeit money.

Thursday, 11th. I felt so much worse today that I reported to the sick call stayed till I was tired & cold, no Dr came & I returned.

Friday, 12th (Feb'y). Still failing I went to Drs. Call again & was unexpectedly ordered over to Gen Hospital, on the whole I was not sorry especially after being nearly all day in getting through I found myself so completely exhausted that I could scarcely stand finding myself greeted as one of the sickest in consequence I took my bunk, kept it & suffered myself to be treated accordingly. I will remark here that I was much surprised from the start in the management of this prison Hospit. Our own boys are far more attentive & kind than I had been led to anticipate reports, while it is the infernal Reb authorities that do nearly all the stealing & swindling. It seems as if it could be, that at the proper time God will curse this sin polluted people. They are now over run with lice will not all the plagues of Egypt be visited upon them. My own nurse is a true Buckeye boy (1st. O. Cav) & has already shown me some attention God

7) Does he mean "again?"

help him. In extras or luxuries. I have received a few butter crackers, Tamarinds, Java Coffee & beef tea from the Extract all from our own good government, the Rebellion shows us no such favors at her own expense.

Saturday (13th). About the same as yesterday.

Sunday 14th. Valentines day. And how I would like to be exerting my ingenuity upon the usual love epistles but the privilege is denied me & I must be content. I had all the coffee I had ought to drink today though I could have relished more, about three pints in all.

Tuesday 16th. I notice that for some reason our luxuries are all cut off so we are down to corn dodger & soup or a small morsel of meat. Last night I got about two gills of white beans, this morning nothing but a small piece of corn-bread. Think of that for a sick man in what is pretended a civilized country.

Memoranda. Complaints have been made as to our treatment both here & on the island, about the first of the month some persons with the med. director went to the island & had the rations increased. The Reb. Congress then orders an investigation which occurred I think about the sixth make a report to congress who report on the 13th that the charges are without foundation. On the tenth our rations were as small as ever & thus stands their record before the world.

Sunday 21st (Feby). Today I wrote Hawley & Eva, I sent to Hawley for a box of eatables. Wonder if they ever come. Have been gaining in all respects but strength faith & courage good. Have been bunking for several days with a young man by the name of Nichols. Rather an intelligent young man & will remember him. Our rations are not permanently reduced. My nurse favors me a little & I am doing quite well.

Monday (Feby 22). Nichols was transferred to another hospital this morning he was very kind.

(Here four pages are gone.)

Wednesday, March 2nd, 1864. The morning opens bright & clear but cool after a two days rain storm. I feel bright as a dollar got up made up report toasted my bread ate my breakfast, ate heartier than for several days felt far less inconvenienced from it am not very tired as I have generally felt.

(The diary ends here, no doubt reflecting his worsening health during those final days preceding the death of J. O. Coburn in the prison hospital on March 8, 1864.)

Richmond Va

Oct 26th 1863

Father.

I am a prisoner here much jaded by the march but otherwise well, & in as good spirits as could be expected.

Will you be so kind as to write to H. F. Thomas, Napoleon, Mich. C. C. Fuller Esq Big Rapids Mich. & Miss Eva Aldrich, Olcott N. Y. and tell them of it. also as many others as you wish. Be sure & write to Edwin - now dont delay these favors -- please ---

Circumstances require brevity. so you will excuse it Im sure.

Yours as ever

J. O. Coburn.

Belle Island Prison Camp
(Near Richmond) Feby 6th 1864

Father.

After so long a silence, I write you again. I should have done so long ago but I had heard nothing from a single person in the North. Last week I received a letter from Eva saying you had written her & that "you thought a letter would not reach me." 'Tis a mistake. Write by all means, but briefly & nothing contraband. I am not well. Have not been since I came here never expect to be again, though I shall weather it through if I remain another year. We have been hoping all along to be released upon some terms. The day is now apparently as distant as ever. The soldiers, great numbers of them have been receiving Expressed boxes of necessities. I have concluded the circumstances will justify me in asking you to put me up a box of substantial eatables, send to Edgerton or Antwerp & have it Expressed to me. I believe there is no expense to the sender or receiver. But what if there is, I need them & know you will send them. Let me suggest, Smoked ham 20 lbs. Maple sugar 15 lbs, cheese 10 lbs coffee 5 lb Dried Beef 25 lb Butter 10 to 15 lbs or in lieu of Butter Lard or Fried meat fat put up in water tight vessels, Tea 2 lbs a little pepper, mustard or any thing say Raddish roots. I (undecipherable) a large box, of course you can make it of any convenient quantities, only the box must not weigh to exceed 100 lbs.

You will watch the news, should an exchange be effected before you are ready to send the box, hold on to it. If not please send it to Serge J. O. Coburn - U. S. Prisoner of War, Richmond, Va. (Belle Island Prison) below. Will settle the bill at some future day. Write me a long letter to send in the box giving all news, & a brief one to send by mail addressed in the same manner. All boxes are inspected here in the presence of the owner. Any contraband matter renders the whole liable to confiscation. All Northern money is contraband except gold & silver. Send no money of any kind. Hoping to hear from you soon but that it may be inside our own lines, I am as Ever

Osborn

Sergt J. O. Coburn
Co I 6th Mich Cavalry
U. S. Prisoner of War
Richmond Va
Belle Island Prison Camp

Published in THE NEW ERA, Auburn, Indiana newspaper issue dated Saturday morning August 27, 1864. Also published in THE WEEKLY CHRISTIAN RECORD Indianapolis, Indiana issue dated Tuesday, August 9, 1864.

Funeral of J. O. Coburn

Died-- In the thirty-third year of his age, at the prison hospital in Richmond, Virginia, March 8th 1864, Q.M. Sergeant Jacob Osburn Coburn, Co. I, 6th Michigan cavalry, of Big Rapids, Mercorta county, Michigan, eldest son of Elder John F. Coburn, of DeKalb county, Indiana. The cause and circumstances of his death are shown in the following letter from his fellow prisoner and death-bed companion, Albert S. Patrick of New York, to the father of the deceased:

"Your son fell a victim to the inhuman cruelty and barbarous treatment of our captors, and I do not overstate the truth when I say that he literally starved to death on Belle Isle. He came to the prisoners' hospital on the 14th of February, sick with chronic diarrhea. I was acting Stewart at the time, and when he came in, noticed he was a man of more than ordinary intelligence, and soon made his acquaintance. I furnished him every comfort possible under the circumstances, and he so far recovered as to come down stairs and try to do my writing. I felt greatly encouraged in regard to his case, and cheered him all I could, but three days had not passed before he relapsed, and in forty-eight hours was dead. His system was completely worn out and nature could not rally. To give you some idea of how fearfully emaciated he was, I will tell you that his ankle was far larger than his thigh, and his hip bones protruded through the skin. * * * * His mind was clear up to his latest breath and he conversed in regard to his approaching end, calmly, and I never before saw a man to whom death had so few horrors; and whenever I think of him, I pray my last end may be like his.

Three thousand of our men are filling prisoners' graves in Richmond, and this since September 30th, '63. I am in possession of facts and figures taken from the hospital records, that, if compiled in shape, would cause the entire civilized world to cry out, "Shame on the abortion of a Davis Government." * * * * What think you of 10 oz. of bread made of unsifted meal, 2 oz. of poor beef and one pint of black pea soup, without the peas, as a ration for a convalescent sick man? By ration, I mean twenty-four hours supply of food."

The funeral services were conducted by Elder James Hadsell, at the Christian Church in the Coburn settlement, in Concord, DeKalb County, Indiana, May 1st, 1864.



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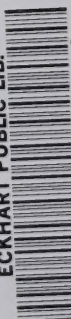
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